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MODERN COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTURE

BLEY AND LYMAN
ARCHITECTS

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Modern Commercial Architecture

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MODERN COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTURE

Broadly speaking, Modern Architecture is contemporary Architecture. All the past historical architectural styles were modern at the time of their formation. An architectural style to be truly modern must be designed to fulfill the needs and express the aspirations of the age which gives it birth.

An architectural style is a result and not a product; that is, it is the result of the architect's conscientious effort to solve the problem of the building which he is designing. A building is only successful when it meets the requirements of the owner. Since Gothic Architecture this fact has been lost sight of until recently. Architecture has passed thru a period of self-consciousness, imitation, archaeology and eclecticism.

At the beginning of the present century, a new movement of thought in architecture was started. The influence of this new movement becomes increasingly greater as times goes on. Its results, at the present time, are known to the most provincial but the ideals which produce those results are not so widely known.

Within this new movement are many schools of thought starting from a similar set of premises. In general, an attempt is underway to return to the basic rules of good architecture; that is, architectural design as a successful solution of the problem in hand, utilizing all the native and acquired skill of the architect, all the newest discoveries of structural and mechanical engineering, all the latest developments in building materials and all labor and time saving devices of modern industry to produce a perfect building.

All the past great styles of architecture have resulted from following these precepts. As a result the masterpieces of the past have been an expression of the civilizations which produced them. They have always incorporated the architects highest striving for beauty, and his successful attempt to make his buildings practical for the purpose for which they were designed. They have always been built with the most advanced structural methods then known, utilizing the most competent workmanship.

In the last fifty years there have been three epoch making discoveries in architecture. These are the discovery and development of structural steel skeleton construction, the discovery of reinforced concrete and the invention of the high speed elevator. Co-existant with these structural and mechanical advances has been an enormous development of new natural and synthetic building materials which has broadened the modern architects vocabulary of expression. A building embodying these recent advances can no longer logically be treated in a past style which was evolved as an expression of older systems of construction.

Although the architects vocabulary has been thus increased, yet because of the improvement in facilities of manufacture this multiplication of the number of materials available has not been accompanied by an advance in cost—quite the contrary—new methods of producing old effects have reduced their cost and many new effects and combinations of old and new materials are now obtainable inexpensively.

Besides utilizing the advances in modern mass production, distribution and efficient business organization to reduce the cost of modern buildings, the very simplicity of the modern style contributes to this same result. The advance in the cost of labor has been counter-balanced by this simplicity of design. The architect's effort is now directed towards designing a beautiful building thru a careful study of form, of proportion in mass and line, in place of covering the facade of his building with a profusion of intricate ornament. Ornament is used sparingly and for focal effect as it should be. Flat but interesting surfaces are obtained by a judicious use of textures and colors. The modern architect realizes that an inexpensive and attractive building is obtained by a careful study by him in the preliminary stages of the project rather than by an ostentatious design.

The architect is able, moreover, because of his close contact with the latest developments in the building industry to accurately estimate the cost of a building. By obtaining alternate bids for

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different processes and materials he can in the end produce a set of plans which will result in as economical and up to date a building as possible, fulfilling the requirements of his client, and yet this result is obtained before the ground is broken for the project.

These new factors from the practical standpoint in architecture increase the need for and the responsibility of the architect. His position has changed from that of an artist to that of an executive. In architecture as in other fields of our modern commercial civilization complication has developed a need for an efficient specialist. The modern architect fulfills this need in the field of contemporary commercial building. His equipment includes a knowledge of building, mercantile and labor laws, design and construction—In addition he is the only person who is qualified by training and experience to expertly protect the interests of his clients as his disinterested representative in contacts and controversies in connection with completing a building project.

Modern Architecture then is the utilization of all the recent advances in construction combining the many new and old building materials, in a logical and truthful manner, in a building to produce a beautiful structure which fulfills the requirements of the owner.

This booklet is an evidence of the work of the office of Bley and Lyman in their attempt to fulfill these requirements and possibilities, following them thru to their end in some recently completed buildings. Altho all the buildings illustrated herein are designed in the modern style there still exist in modern civilization, many projects whose requirements so closely resemble the needs of former times that they may be appropriately expressed by older forms of architecture.

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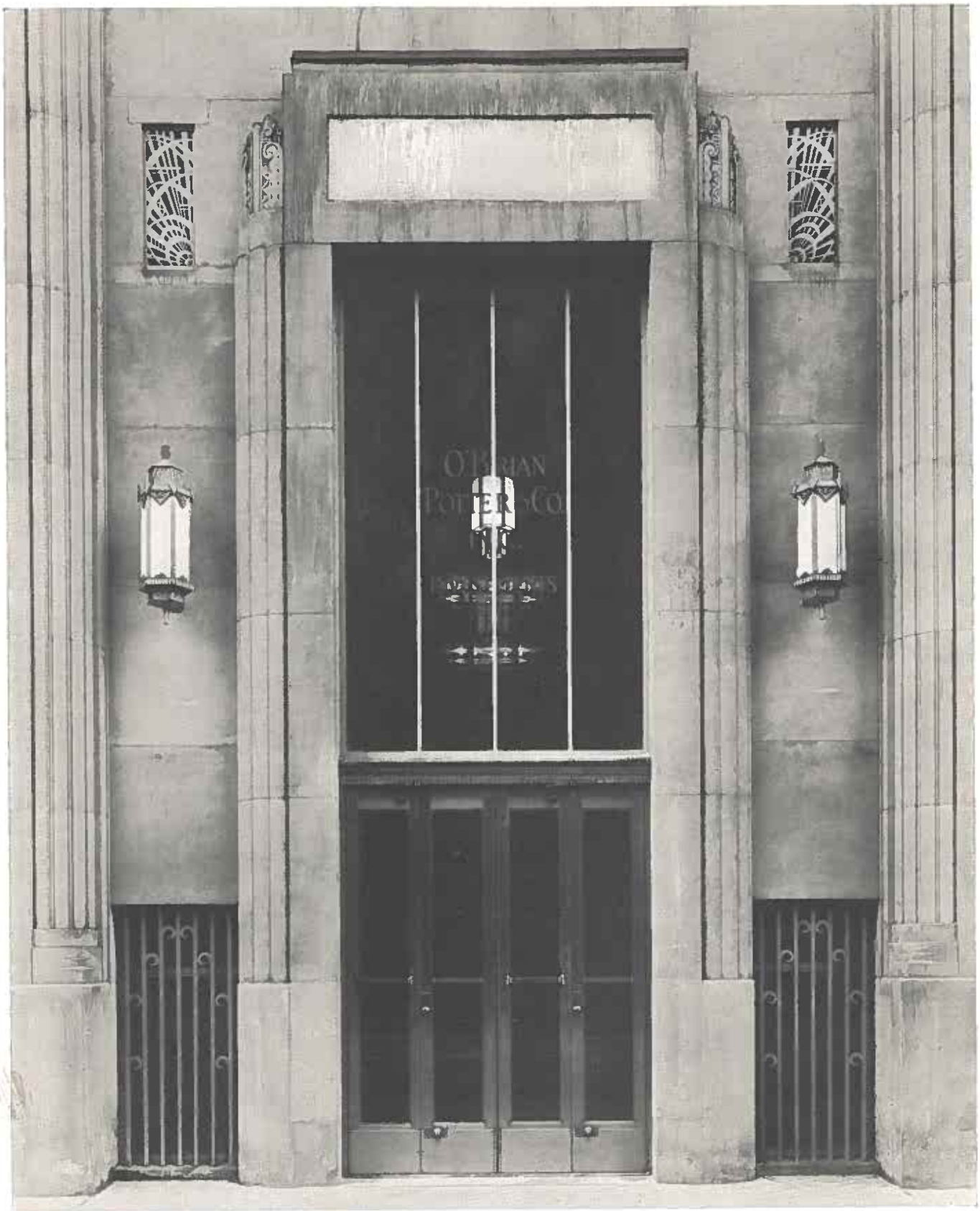

New and simplified forms composed with regard to long established rules of design. — Seventeen Court Street Building.

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Seventeen Court Street Building — An Investment House executed in limestone and metal. The design and mass are simplified, but well studied.

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Interior of an elevator cab — Seventeen Court St. Building. The floor is of rubber tile. The walls are of metal simulating inlaid oriental woods so prevalent in modern furniture.

The Bond Room in the Seventeen Court Street Building — The ceiling is of run plaster and the lighting fixtures are of chrome plated metal and opal glass. The lighting of the room is indirect and diffused.

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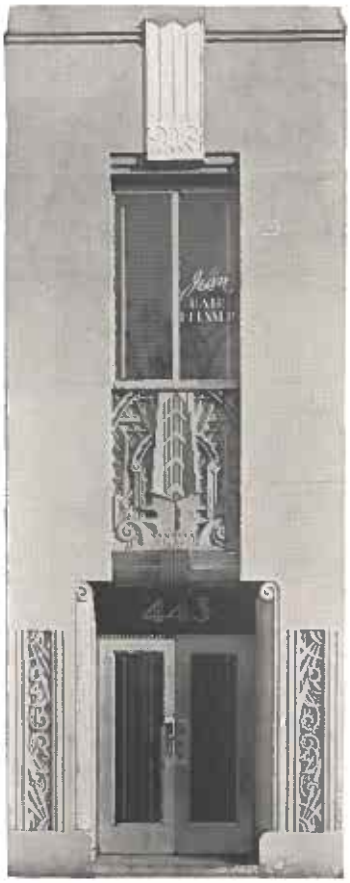

Top. Number 443 Delaware Building. A modern facade executed in modern materials — Limestone, Marble, Vitrolite, Glass and Cast Aluminum are used.

Above. Stair to offices — Number 443 Delaware Building. An interesting design depending almost wholly on line for its effect.

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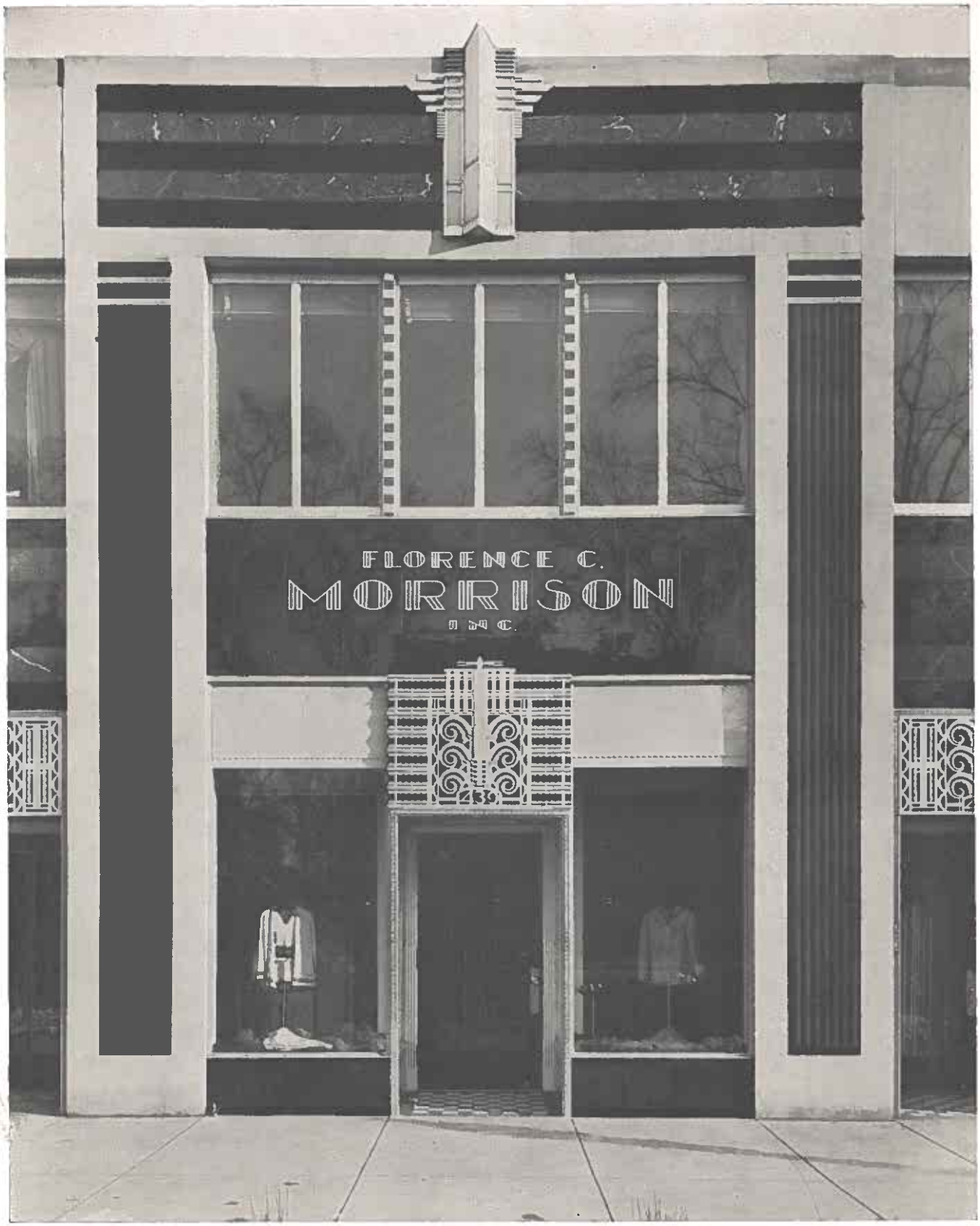

One of the store fronts in Number 443 Delaware Building. The windows are framed by etched Vitrolite pilasters and a frieze of Vitrolite and Verde Antique Marble. A cast aluminum grille emphasizes the entrances.

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The Vars Building — A store and office Building for an advertising firm. Provision is made for four additional future stories.

The Vars Building — Flood lighting at night was decided upon at the start and incorporated in the Architect's design.

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The Vars Building — Entrance to the offices. The metal doors are set back in a Vitrolite recess.

A show window of the Vars Building — The impervious materials used in the design insure that the store front will remain always bright and attractive.

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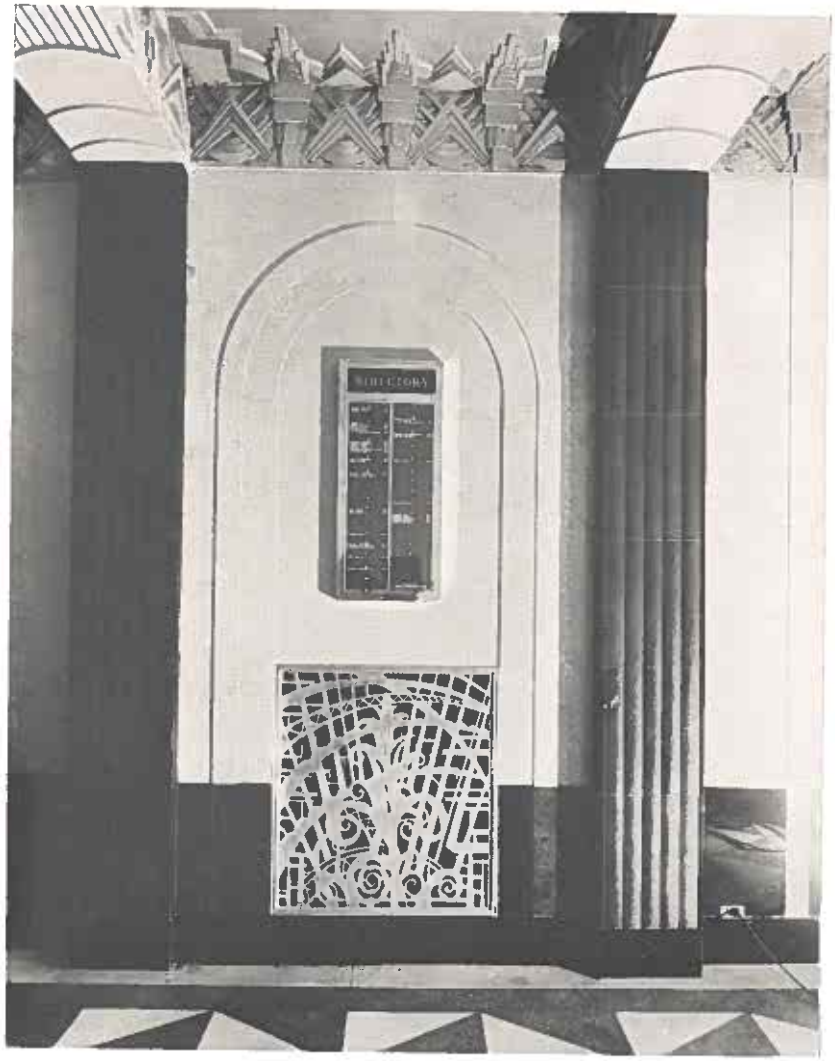
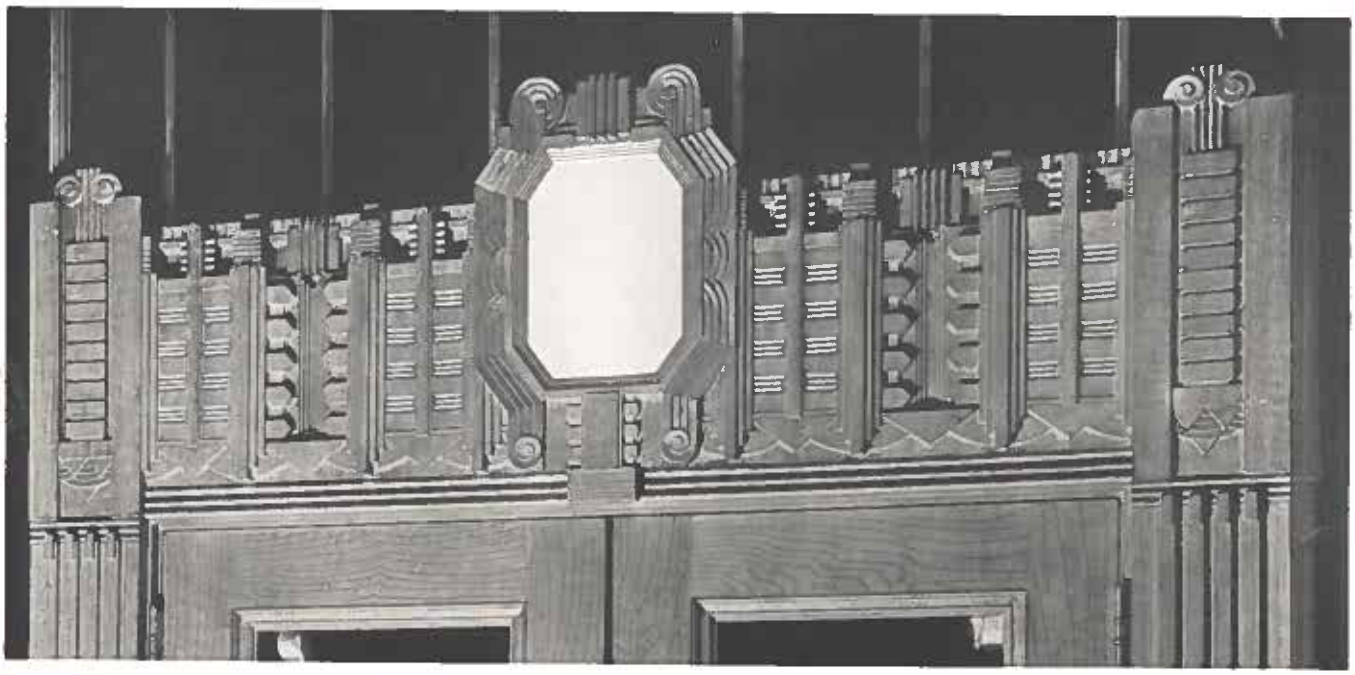


The directory in the Lobby of the Vars Building — The floor is Terrazzo; the wainscot Vitrolite; the walls Mankato Stone, and the ceiling painted plaster. The grille is chromium plated metal.

The Vars Building — A wood grille over the lobby entrance door with a lighting fixture incorporated in its design.



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LIGHTING IN MODERN COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTURE

The last few years have seen the beginning of a revolution in commercial architecture. A large part of the interest aroused in the public in any business is the result of its ability to advertise by night, as well as by day. Therefore, we find light becoming one of the principal factors in this new development of commercial architecture. Business men are beginning to realize that only architects are qualified to design this type of lighting with the distinction necessary to the publicity of an established business enterprise.

The design of a commercial building presents to the architect of today a very different set of problems than it did even a few years ago. No longer can he design a building regarding only its appearance during the day and depending upon flood lights, placed where possible after the building is completed, to stimulate an interest in the public. He must create a structure in which his design is as clearly defined when illuminated at night as it is by day. Indeed light is used as a means to bring out the architectural features. To execute this new conception of architectural design requires familiarity with all phases of lighting development, with the newest methods, and with the possibilities and limitations of the medium itself. It also requires a knowledge of the powers of reflection and absorption of materials.

To dominate the competing publicity of rival concerns the company erecting a new commercial building must enlist all the possibilities of modern lighting in its behalf. The public's attention is attracted to a building at night, it is true, by brilliant illumination, but where a number of buildings are equally striving for attention that building which exhibits an ingenious and imaginative use of light will finally win the interest of the public. Such a building will fix itself in the mind of the public more strongly and will be remembered long after the others have been forgotten.

The architect has at his command not only a variety of light but the different effects given by the same intensity of light upon different materials. He has at his command not only color but movement. He has possibilities in the illumination of architectural forms; these forms no longer remain historical architectural motifs but become a modified form of them designed from the point of view of their effect when illuminated. The light may be thrown upon the surface of a building or be transmitted thru a translucent material incorporated in the structure itself. There is the possibility of a striking silhouette against a dark sky or the opportunity of merely accenting the design by light.

Interiors offer similar possibilties for the use of light for decoration and emphasis. As well as attracting the eye to a particular point by means of light, in various forms, areas of light either in white or color may take the place of painted decoration or ornamental plaster—this is colorama. Besides being a lighting effect, this decoration may also be ever-changing in design and color. It is particularly effective to highly illuminate a form or display in an interior with a constant light outlining it against a background of color and movement. Ceiling and wall illumination, either from direct fixtures or from concealed light sources, add other facilities to the architect's repertoire. The revival of expert craftsmanship in metal and glass insures a pleasing result when such fixtures are a part of the design.

Display rooms justify themselves by their success in selling merchandise—To create interest and stimulate a desire for possession of the article is the purpose of all forms of display. This cannot be accomplished by a confused and overloaded display room floor. Forms must be simple so that the eye can be guided to a focal point, which must be arranged with freshness, light and color to hold the interest. Also the product must be displayed in such a way as to emphasize its beauty and utility. Here light, with its ability to dramatize, is of great advantage.

The display window may be compared to a stage; the merchandise to the players. The same considerations which govern stage lighting should, in a measure, influence the architect when designing this setting. Here obviously light is again a great factor in enhancing the display.

The importance of psychology is being increasingly recognized as a factor in commerce. It is surprising to see how much a visitor to a sales room is impressed, made comfortable and brought into a receptive frame of mind by imaginatively conceived and carefully planned lighting.

The following photographs show the application of these new principles of lighting by the office of Bley & Lyman in some recently completed modern buildings. The aim has been to attract attention; to focus it upon the products on display, and to stimulate the imagination of the visitors into seeing themselves possessors of the article on display. It has been the aim to do this subtlely and unostentatiously, yet no less effectively. At the same time the lighting has been kept in harmony with the design of the building and made a part of it.

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Niagara Hudson Building, Niagara Falls — An example of the use of the advances in modern lighting, for display and publicity purposes.

A room in the Niagara Hudson Building, Niagara Falls, where the management of the company comes in direct contact with the customers it serves. Thus, does modern architecture parallel new ideas in business policy.

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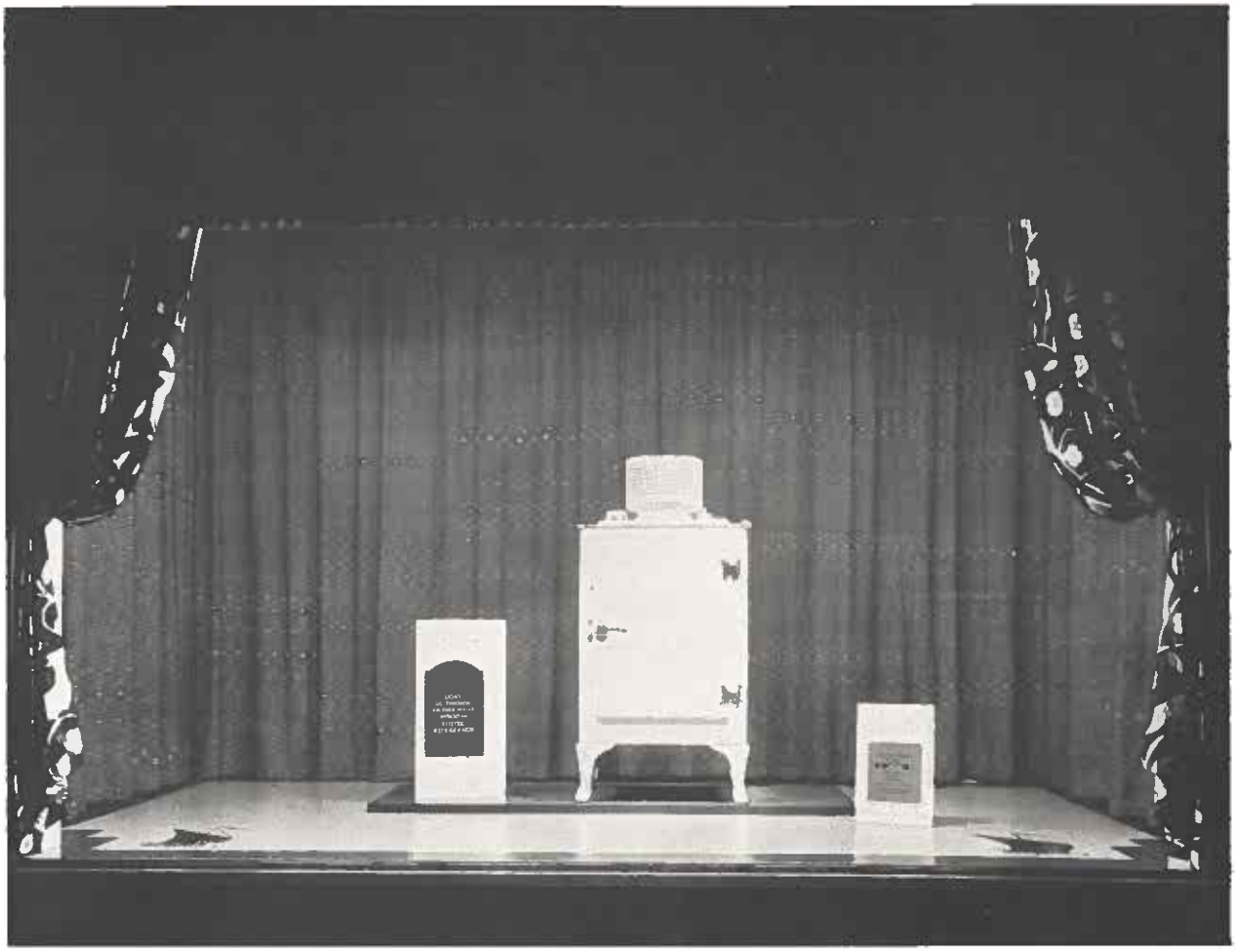
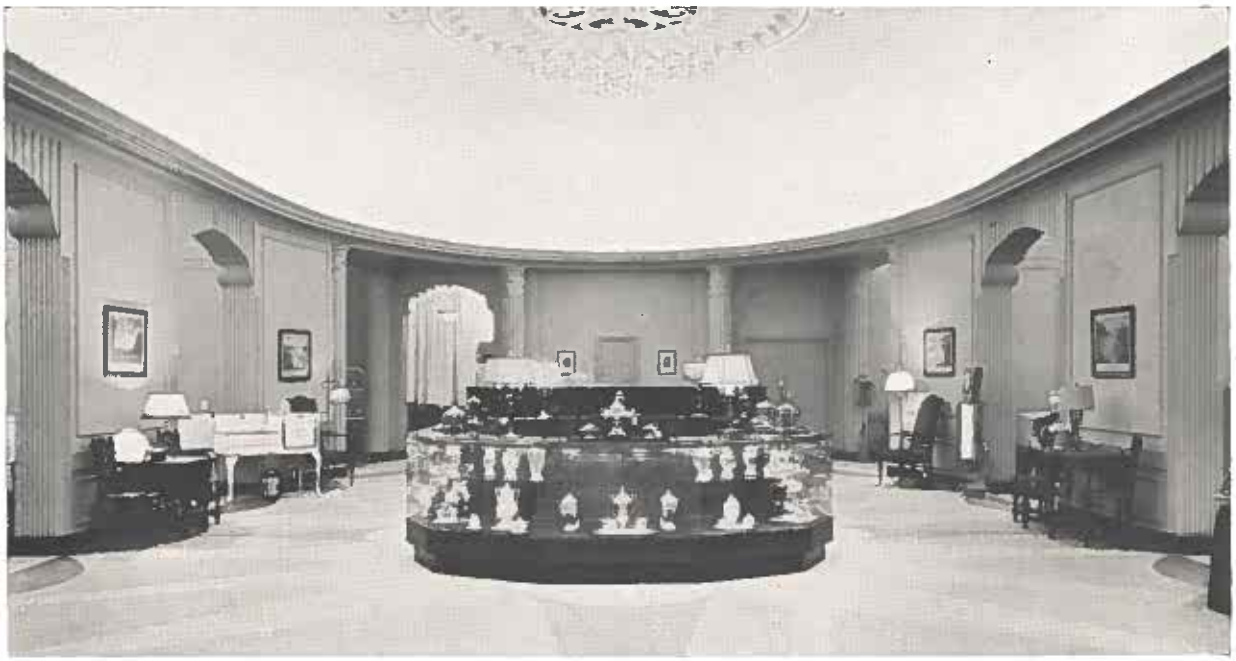


A Show Window — Niagara Hudson Building, Niagara Falls. The display is composed as carefully as the movement of a dance upon the stage.

Sales Space — Niagara Hudson Building, Niagara Falls. The customers are led thru this room, where appliances sold by the company and utilizing their power are on display, to the cashier's counter in the rear where bills are paid.



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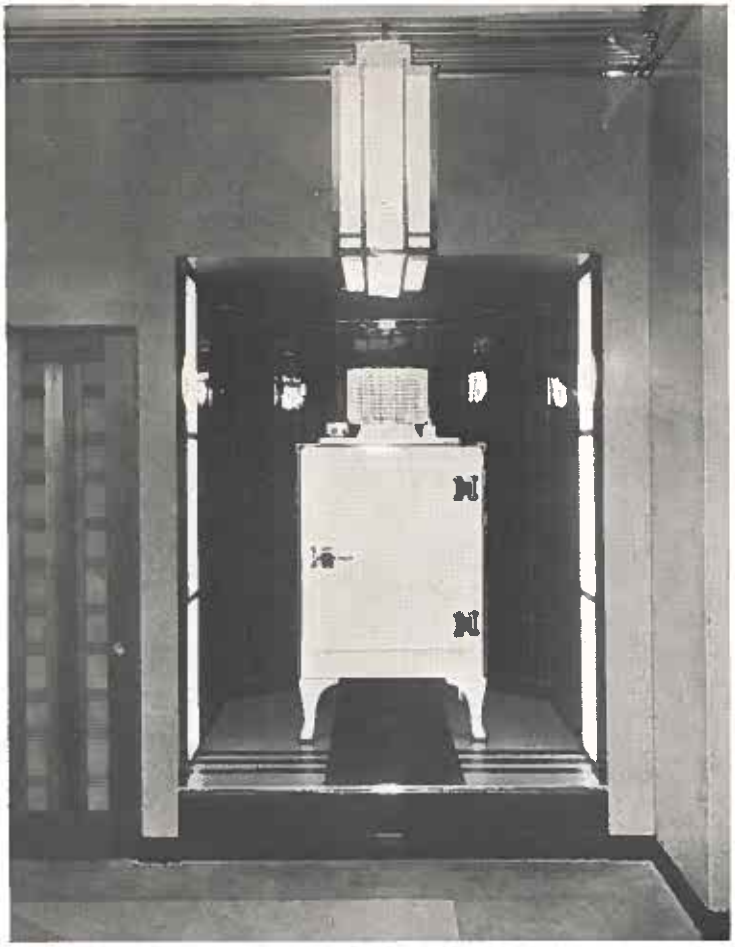

The Buffalo General Electric Building. A display of an Electric Refrigerator which is silhouetted against black Vitrolite and lighted by concealed lights. The result is as striking as a poster.

The Buffalo General Electric Building. A Demonstration Kitchen where the company may demonstrate the use of its appliances. The kitchen is designed within a proscenium like a stage.

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The Buffalo General Electric Building. The Sales Space where appliances are exhibited. The entire light for this room is furnished by the fixtures built into the piers. The effect is as of daylight.

Buffalo General Electric Building. The cashier's counter in the Sales Space carried out in metal and different textured Vitrolite. The absence of bars and grilles creates a feeling of friendliness in the customer.

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The Buffalo General Electric Building — The information desk which opens into the elevator lobby as well as into the sales space. It has the simplicity and cleanness of line of a modern automobile.

The Buffalo General Electric Building looking towards the entrance vestibule. The first floor of this building, shown in these photographs, was remodeled in the modern manner.

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